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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO OSCE PROJECT
COORDINATOR IN UZBEKISTAN

1. Post is authorized to make the following statement at the May 8, 2008, meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna:

Begin Text:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Venczel to the Permanent Council in his new role as the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan. We are confident that, with his extensive experience in the region, he will be successful in this important work in Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ambassador, it is encouraging that the Government of Uzbekistan has granted you a three-year accreditation, and recently approved fifteen of nineteen outstanding project proposals. We see these as positive measures for enhancing Uzbekistan's relationship with the Project Coordinator's Office and an indication of support for the OSCE's work. That said, we hope that in the future the process for reviewing project proposals can be shortened so as to reduce the time needed for implementation, and we hope that projects will be approved without limitations placed on implementation.

The United States fully supports the Project Coordinator's work in all three dimensions. The Project Coordinator's work on anti-terrorism activities, such as conducting travel document security workshops, and its work assisting the police academy, are proven examples of good cooperation with the authorities to consolidate security. We also commend the Project Coordinator's work to advance economic development while promoting rule of law, such as the opening of two commercial arbitration courts and training for judges.

We note that the Office was able to make progress in human dimension activities over the past year despite working with a new, limited mandate. We believe the Office's outreach to inform the public, academicians, politicians, and NGOs about OSCE commitments, especially in the field of human rights, can have a very positive impact. We were particularly impressed by the training courses for law faculty on UN and OSCE commitments in the field of human rights and rule of law, and we hope to see such types of projects continued. We hope, nonetheless, that Uzbekistan will allow the Office to become a center with a full mandate across all three dimensions.

In February, the United States intervened before this Council to note the limited progress made by Uzbekistan in meeting its Helsinki Commitments. We have continued to see progress, but unfortunately also some backtracking, specifically concerning religious freedom and NGO accreditation. We hope that these concerns are resolved soon, and believe the Project Coordinator's Office can help officials sort through some of these issues.

As Ambassador Venczel outlined in his report, the Project

Coordinator,s Office has done an excellent job in working with other OSCE institutions*including the Strategic Police Matters Unit, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and ODIHR*to advance the goal of meeting OSCE commitments by providing expert assistance. We hope this cooperation continues, especially in light of the final ODIHR election report released in April on Uzbekistan,s presidential election, which ODIHR assessed as falling short of OSCE commitments. ODIHR has once again done a commendable job in detailing specific recommendations to improve Uzbekistan,s election process in the future, and we count on the Uzbek authorities to implement these recommendations, many of which were contained in ODIHR,s final report on the 2004 Uzbek parliamentary elections.

The United States takes note of recent efforts by the Project Coordinator,s Office and the Government of Uzbekistan to promote regional activities and cooperation, including the October conference on sustainable development in the region and, most recently, the April conference on security in Central Asia. Security in the region will depend to some degree on the success of international efforts in neighboring Afghanistan. We are therefore pleased that Uzbekistan is engaging with its neighbors and with international organizations to support stabilization efforts. On the OSCE front, we hope that this results in Uzbekistan,s participation in regional training activities for borders and customs officials, and a successful OSCE-led border

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assessment in Uzbekistan that can set the stage for improved border and customs management.

As always, the United States supports the important role that the OSCE Project Coordinator,s Office in Tashkent can play in assisting the Government of Uzbekistan fulfill its Helsinki commitments. We stand ready to support the Government and the Project Coordinator in their efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman
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